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JULY 16

### Students: We Want Our Vegetables

*California Endowment-funded program brings parents, schools together for healthy food access.*

**Ashburn, Virginia (July 16, 2009)** — Congress, kids do like their vegetables.

As congressional members consider the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act this year, they might want to hear what some 50 grade- and middle-school students in south Los Angeles County told INMED Partnerships for Children.

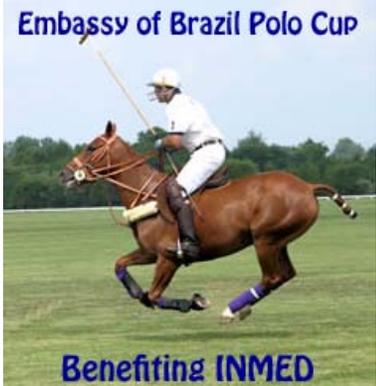
They want more healthy foods.

The students were part of focus groups at schools in the Compton Unified School District. The focus groups were organized by INMED's Food for Thought program, designed to bring parents and the district together to address obesity among children and ensure access to healthy foods for their students.

"What we learned from the students," said Joey Shanahan, the Food for Thought program manager, "is that they want to see fresh and delicious fruits and vegetables in their schools. Students want to be healthy." The program is funded by a two-year, \$400,000 grant from The California Endowment. Food for thought, consider:

- All students participating in the focus groups said they enjoy fruits and vegetables and that they want a variety of foods offered to them. They are willing to try new foods.
- At one school, when asked what schools should serve at snack bars, the overwhelming majority said fruit, trail mix and water. Only a handful pointed to chips or other junk foods.
- At another school, about half the students said they bring their own fruit to school with them.

Furthermore, a majority of the students said they either always eat food served at their schools for breakfast and lunch or they do so most of the time. Many of those who never eat at school, either breakfast or lunch, reported eating fast foods or nothing at all, although some did say they have vegetables and fruits at home



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The news is encouraging, Shanahan said, as her program and others like it across the country seek to increase the access families have to healthier foods, especially in poorer communities like Compton. For many, school meals are the best option to provide that access because of a lack of merchants offering healthy foods, limited transportation to reach those stores that do and limited income.

Compton is one of the poorer communities in the nation, and advocates such as Shanahan maintain that the obesity problem there (29 percent of kids in the city are obese or overweight) is not a coincidence.

The problem of obesity, she added, is not always a matter of individual choices people make when selecting their diets but rather limited access to healthy options along with other external factors such as access to parks or crime rates that limit children's activity levels.

"We know that many children and their families need greater access to healthy food choices whether at school or elsewhere in the community, and working with school district officials is a significant step forward to achieve that goal," she said.

Although laws at the state and federal level have been passed to address healthy food access, Shanahan said she would like to see more resources provided to local communities to curtail what continues to be a growing national problem.

The federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act is one such opportunity to increase healthy food access. Set to expire on Sept. 30, the Act, which established the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program to provide low-income children free or reduced-priced nutritious foods, the aim among advocates now is to seek improvements in the Act, such as investing more dollars in poorer schools unable to currently provide breakfast or by improving the nutrition standards for foods served at school.

The issue becomes all the more acute when considering that more children will become eligible for the program based on income due to the sour economy, and the rising cost of food.

Additionally, although the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch program under the Act are permanently authorized, many other programs such as the Summer Food Service Program and the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children require reauthorization every five years.

Parents, noted Food for Thought Community Organizer Taniesha Roby, see first hand the difference nutritious foods make in their children.

"They know what their children eat corresponds with their behavior at school and at home. They know eating healthier foods means their children will perform better in school," she said. "Healthier kids mean healthier communities. How's that for food for thought?"

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